

VZCZCXRO6348

OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #0945/01 0871554

ZNY SSSSS ZZH

O 271554Z MAR 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6505

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE

RUEPGAB/MNF-I C2X BAGHDAD IZ IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000945

SIPDIS

NOFORN

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2018

TAGS: MOPS PGOV PINS PTER I2

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN IRAQ SITUATION REPORT: MARCH 27, 13:00

LOCAL

Classified By: DEPUTY POL-MIL COUNSELOR KAREN H. SASAHARA, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

**¶1.** (S/REL MCFI) SUMMARY: The below is a situation report for Basrah and other southern provinces, reflecting reporting from PRTs and REO Basrah, open-source media, and Embassy Baghdad. In Basrah, JAM continues to occupy its traditional strongholds and conduct harassing attacks on ISF throughout the city. Confrontations between ISF and JAM are occurring in central Basrah, which is not under control of either side. JAM resistance is expected to remain strong through the next 24 hours, if not longer. Most of south-central Iraq remains tense but stable. Maysan appears calm, but this appears to be due to ISF reluctance to confront JAM there. Some JAM fighters may be leaving al-Amarah, capital of Maysan, to reinforce their compatriots in Basrah.

**¶2.** (S/REL MCFI) SUMMARY CONTINUED: Iraqi security leadership, including the Prime Minister, remain in Basrah personally directing operations. The Prime Minister has requested that Coalition ground forces in Basrah province (MND-SE) join the fight; this request has not been fulfilled. However, Coalition fixed and rotary wing air support to ISF continues to provide close air support, intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance, and other mission support. END SUMMARY.

#### OPERATIONS IN BASRAH: TOUGH RESISTANCE FROM JAM

**¶3.** (S/REL MCFI) Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have made some gains, but experienced some losses in Basrah. JAM strongholds persist on the western side of the city and in pockets to the north and on the east side of the river, while a smaller number of neighborhoods are under ISF control in the north and south of Basrah. The heart of the city is in contention and Multinational Division ) Southeast (MND-SE) anticipates a stiff defense by JAM for at least the next 24 hours. The ISF has now secured Al Ashshar (southeast of Timanyah), but they have lost two Iraqi Police (IP) stations in Al Maqil, just south of Camp Apache, a depot believed to be an ISF ammunition storage area. ISF reinforcements sent to secure Camp Apache were driven out by militia, but the Camp remains under ISF control. JAM continues to conduct harassing attacks throughout Basrah.

**¶4.** (S/REL MCFI) Local media in Basrah report between 40-60 killed and 200 wounded in the fighting to date. There was an unsuccessful assassination attempt targeting Provincial Director of Police MG Jalil; he is uninjured but three Iraqis with him were killed. There have been attacks in Az Zubayr, just outside Basrah, over the past 24 hours and militia have seized one IP station and a check point. There have been two indirect fire attacks on Shaibah, headquarters of IA forces

in Basrah and a private security company vehicle was hit by an IED in the Basrah oil fields killing two employees.

#### IRAQI LEADERSHIP AND PLANNING

¶5. (S/REL MCFI) PM Maliki, MOD Abdul Qadir, and MOI al-Bulani remain at the Basrah Palace; PM Maliki has plans to leave the Palace tomorrow, but this may change depending on the situation. We are not aware of an expected date for the ministers' return to Baghdad. Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander LTG Austin and Pol-Mil M/C are presently visiting Basrah to reinforce Coalition support for the operation. NSA Rubaie is scheduled to return to Baghdad from Saudi Arabia this evening. Of significant concern is post-conflict planning, which is not at all apparent and without which the situation could quickly deteriorate to conditions even worse than were seen prior to the operation.

¶6. (S/REL MCFI) Iraqi C-130 aircraft are providing resupply to ISF in Basrah. Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) personnel are assisting the Iraqis to organize their logistics effort, which was not planned in advance due to the PM's directive to begin operations in Basrah as soon as possible. However, so far ISF are being supported with Iraqi supplies and equipment being delivered by Iraqi assets.

#### COALITION SUPPORT IN BASRAH

¶7. (S/REL MCFI) PM Maliki has requested MND-SE (UK) ground forces to assist in ISF operations in Basrah. Coalition transition teams are embedded in the Iraqi forces fighting in Basrah, including IA, ISOF, and NP units. A QRF from MND-SE remains available, but has not yet been committed. The Coalition continues to provide ISR in support of the ISF,

BAGHDAD 00000945 002 OF 003

as well as assistance with MEDEVAC and treatment of ISF casualties.

¶8. (S/REL MCFI) MND-SE is fielding numerous requests for support from the ISF, some of which could have been avoided if the operation had been launched with more advance planning. Iraqi expectations of support appear high, while their understanding of how the Coalition operates to provide it is sometimes incomplete.

¶9. (S/REL MCFI) Four U.S. Apache attack helicopters and two U.S. Blackhawk utility helicopters are dedicated to Basra operating out of Tallil, but strong winds and dust grounded them last night. There have been eight U.S. fixed-wing missions in support of ISF in Basrah over the past two days including close air support (four missions), overwatch, and show of force.

#### ACTIVITY IN MAYSAN AND SOUTHERN PROVINCES

¶10. (S/REL MCFI) Reports indicate that Al Amarah remains under the control of JAM; possibly enabling it to send reinforcements to Basrah. Reporting indicates that up to 300 JAM members may have left Al Amarah for Basrah although this has not been verified.

10th IA MiTT (Military Transition Team of Coalition soldiers) reports the Dawa Party headquarters in Maysan Province was attacked and burned down along with several IP and at least one IA checkpoints being attacked. MG Habeeb, Commander of the 10th IA Division, is attempting to gain situational awareness in Maysan Province while maintaining control in Dhi Qar and Muthanna provinces with particular emphasis on Nasariya and Samawa. Overnight, the situation remained calm in Nasariya and Samawa with curfews in place and a heavy ISF presence. Open source reporting indicates that OMS called for civil disobedience throughout the southern provinces today.

ACTIVITY IN BAGHDAD

¶11. (S/REL MCFI) The mood on the streets of Baghdad is tense this morning. JAM-controlled areas of Sadr City and southwestern Baghdad remain locked down; both neighborhoods have been the point of origin of this week's rocket attacks on the IZ, which continue today. In other parts of the city, most shops are open, but there is substantially less traffic as a result of the 3-4 million inhabitants of Sadr City not being permitted to leave their neighborhood. Since yesterday, some neighborhoods are not getting any electricity from the national grid and water service has been intermittent. There are reports of collateral damage among Baghdad residents.

¶12. (S/REL MCFI) One significant attack took place last night by JAM Special Groups (SG). The attack targeted a CF patrol in Shulla/northern Ghazaliyah that was supporting IA checkpoints. The engagement lasted for several hours, and included air support, resulting in three enemy killed and one wounded; no CF casualties. A CF convoy in Ghazaliyah and a Joint Security Station in Hurriya were attacked without suffering casualties.

¶13. (S/REL MCFI) IA sources in northwestern Baghdad assess that mainstream JAM has held back. Official JAM orders for now seem to be to stick to peaceful methods of expression, i.e., civil disobedience. Attacks appear to be led by JAM-SG, piggybacking on current events, apparently continuing to disobey Moqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire.

¶14. (S/REL MCFI) On Tuesday afternoon, representatives of the OMS for Shulla/Rahmaniya presented IA officers with a Quran and (literally) olive branches, along with an OMS statement confirming instructions of civil disobedience but emphasizing nonviolent intentions. During Tuesday-Wednesday night, at least two IA checkpoints--including the same NW Baghdad checkpoint visited earlier by OMS representatives--were attacked with RPGs and small arms fire, presumably by SG fighters. IA weapons were confiscated at least at one of the checkpoints. Yesterday, Sheikh Mazin (the OMS director for Karkh who is based in Shulla) personally delivered a Quran and olive branches to IA officers at that checkpoint.

#### JAM COURSES OF ACTION

¶15. (S/NF) REO Basrah heard late Wednesday night that OMS in Najaf had issued a Fatwa to end the ceasefire and engage ISF beginning Thursday. Word reached REO Basrah Officer via the REO interpreter after he was contacted by Ali Mohammad Azam

BAGHDAD 00000945 003 OF 003

(protect), Director of the Shaheed Alah Institution, a position from which he manages the political and cultural affairs branch within OMS. The source pleaded for protection of his name, claiming his life would be forfeit otherwise. Both the REO interpreter and REO Officer inferred that attacks on ISF would be country-wide, not restricted to the Basrah area. There was no explicit threat that attacks would also target Coalition Forces. REO cannot ascertain the reliability of the source, who is however a long-time contact of the REO interpreter. This information was passed on to MNF-I, the RSO, and the State Department Operations center early March 27.

¶16. (S/REL MCFI) COMMENT: JAM may seek to increase violence in the nine southern provinces unless PM Maliki calls off the ISF offensive in Basrah. Basrah is a key center of gravity for JAM, and Sadr leadership is unlikely to disengage in the south and Baghdad until they consider Basrah secure from further GoI encroachment. Civil disobedience and mass protests are may be used by OMS to garner favorable media attention and sympathy for the Sadrists. END COMMENT.

CROCKER